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ABSTRACT

This ethnographic study describes the engagement of black students at "Midsouth State University" (MSU) using Pace's (1978) concept of areas of effort. Further, comparisons are made between the black students at MSU and Fleming's (1984) findings concerning black student perceptions in other predominately white institutions located in the South--that academic gains and positive interpersonal relationships at these schools were viewed by black students as lacking. The study results show that MSU black students perceive the faculty as cold, unsympathetic, and unapproachable; the public school integration of the 60s affected older students' perception of self; the lack of a forum for demonstrating leadership abilities positioned the black male in a subdominant role and contributed to strife in their interpersonal relationships; and control of racially marked territories and a dearth of black faculty and administrators contributed to a view of the university as a racist institution. Contains nine references. (Author/GLR)

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Implications From a Black Student Culture for More Effective College Teaching: Black Voices in the White Institution

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RUNNING HEAD: BLACK VOICES

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Abstract

This ethnographic study describes the engagement of black students at Midsouth State University using Pace's (1978) areas of effort. Further, comparisons are made between the black students at Midsouth State University and Fleming's (1984) findings concerning black student perceptions in other predominately white institutions located in the South. The study found Midsouth State University black students perceive the faculty as cold, unsympathetic, and unapproachable; the public school integration of the 60s affected older students perception of self; the lack of a forum for demonstrating leadership abilities positioned the black male in a subdominant role and contributed to strife in their interpersonal relationships; and control of racially marked territories and a dearth of black faculty and administrators contributed to a view of the university as a racist institution.

Implications From a Black Student Culture for a More Effective College Teaching: Black Voices in the White Institution

While universities and colleges seek larger enrollments, and society expresses the concern that minorities attain their full educational potential, often their special needs are unknown and/or ignored by the educational institution. These omissions are increasingly apparent now that black students are enrolling in institutions and majors that traditionally did not attract blacks.

Despite several decades of scholarly interest in minority college performance, few studies have attempted to characterize the black students' experience in the white institution. This paper describes the engagement of the black students at Midsouth State University using Pace's (1978) areas of effort. Further, comparisons are made between perceptions of the black students at Midsouth State University and Fleming's (1984) findings concerning black students perceptions in predominately white institutions located in the South.

Midsouth State University is centrally located in a midsouth metropolitan area. The 1989 census estimates the population of the metropolitan area at just over 650,000, with a racial composition of 50.1% black and 49.1% white. Other higher education institutions in the area include a community college, a state technical school, and a private black college.

The university was integrated in the 70s. In the last ten years the racial enrollment pattern has remained constant with 18% black and 79% white students out of a total enrollment of over 20,000. The university is still viewed by the local black community as a racist institution. On campus this image is reinforced through the campus' newspapers where articles, editorials, and letters to the editor appear concerning alleged racial incidents.

Fleming's (1984) extensive investigation concluded that black students' academic gains and positive interpersonal relationships were not facilitated in the white southern institutions. She hypothesized that the impersonal atmosphere of the institution, the absence of positive and supportive relationships with faculty, and the lack of peer encouragement in classroom situations resulted in the "intellectual deterioration and defensive extracurricular involvements (p. 67)." While social, cultural, and often political

extracurricular involvements provided a release for tension and a forum for positive accomplishments, they drew energies that would otherwise be expended on more academic pursuits. Evidence of opposition to perceived white authority was proposed by a freshman-to-senior heightened cultural consciousness and the student "control of black territories". Opposition to white authority was also observed through students' depression, fatigue, and psychosomatic illnesses, as well as in outright hostility.

Also, Fleming (1984) found increased dissatisfaction in black male-female relationships. While acquiescing to white authority, and without constructive outlets for dominant participation, black men became more aggressive and dominating in their relationships with black women, who in turn, became more submissive in the presence of black men. Michelle Wallace concurred, noting that many females were reticent of "discourses in the presence of black men, because they are intimidated" (Scahill, 1990). At present this issue is of considerable concern in the black culture at large, with a wide diversity of corrective procedures offered. Shahrazad Ali (Commercial Appeal, 1990) called for a renewal of the male leadership role in personal relationships which she claimed were reversed with the adoption of white values after integration.

The national trend of decreasing numbers of black males and increasing numbers of black females attending college has further complicated their interpersonal and sexual relationships. Bart Landry (1987) noted this decline despite the increasing number of black male high school graduates who are eligible for college entrance. He hypothesized the declining national economic condition, reduction of student financial assistance, rising cost of education, and decline in part-time employment opportunities account for the falling black male enrollment. On the other hand, Landry states that females have more family support than do the males, which accounts for their enrollment increase.

Landry's argument appears weak and one suspects other factors are involved. Fleming (1984) said that black females on predominately white Southern campuses, where black males were not "enjoying dominance, social ascendance, or their own assertive abilities, ... may very well be able to develop the assertive capacity ... that help them hold their own intellectually (p. 145)."

It is clear that the educational gap between black males and females is steadily increasing and can be seen as detrimental to the future of the black man in higher education.

It is generally thought that positive experiences in college organizations, and with faculty, administrators, and other students, facilitate learning, (i.e., academic achievement) and positively effect satisfying and competent functioning in society after graduation. The Pace (1987) College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) has been used by more than 200 institutions to assess the effectiveness of undergraduate programs. The scale measures perceptions of effort involving fourteen areas of college life. The areas of concern in this study were categorized as Library Experiences, Experiences with Faculty, Course Learning, Student Union Use, Clubs and Organizations, Personal Experiences, and Student Acquaintances.

The CSEQ was administered to 1057 Midsouth State University graduating seniors, as part of the exiting process, from June, 1988 to May, 1989. Analysis of the questionnaire data revealed that black students perceived themselves as investing more effort in all thirteen areas of the quality of effort scale that did the white students (Davis, 1989). The findings raise several questions. How do the roles of the institution relate to the differing perceptions of effort, if at all? Are there omissions that the institution or faculty could address that would assist the black student in attaining their educational and developmental goals?

Methodology

Using ethnographic methods of participant observation, visual anthropology techniques as proposed by Collier (1986), and both formal and informal interviewing, this paper presents findings based on a study conducted during September 1989 to November 1990. Initially there was no intent to go beyond the campus life into a more holistic approach that is customary in an ethnographic study. However, during the fall, 1990, the study was expanded to include interviews with black faculty and with relevant community leaders from a predominately black community located near the university.

Photography

Collier (1986) supported the early use of the camera as a means of obtaining support and of establishing rapport. In this use

photography is referred to as a "golden key" or "can-opener'. My initial step was to photograph black students on campus, who were engaged in some activity suggestive of "being a student". Later, when the occasion permitted, photography accompanied an interview. Only on one occasion was a request to photograph denied, and that denial was based on religious prescription.

The photographic images exceeded the mere introduction to respondents. They provided insights into the relationship between the institution and the black student, and between diverse student groups, and illustrated the differing student groups' use of space and facilities. In addition, the images testify to the openness with which black students responded when faced with a white woman and her camera.

Interviews

Data collection included formal interviews (frequently taped) and casual interviews. Often the casual interviews were conducted at the time of initial contact with a respondent when a "mall intercept" method was initiated. I would walk up to a student who appeared to be doing something students do and ask "What are you doing?" The "mall intercept" method proved to be not only a successful means for introductions, but also a means of obtaining interviews through networking. Consequently, there were no attempts to set up interviews through formal administrative channels.

Subjects

Thirty-five interviews were conducted with Midsouth State University students. Eight key informants contributed more than two interviews each. Both day students and night students, full and part-time, were represented. Most students were undergraduates. One respondent was a transfer student from a black urban college. Several students transferred from a local junior college. Both sexes were represented and their ages ranged from twenty to fifty-two. Most respondents were employed, either full time or part-time.

Observations

Being a student a Midsouth State University enabled me to observe student/student and student/faculty interactions on a daily bases. In addition, during Black History Month I was invited to a

Fashion Show sponsored by the Black Student Association (BSA). This experience gave me my first understanding of black student organizations' functions.

The Black Student Voice

Academic Arena

The goals of universities and colleges are to create an environment where students can obtain academic competency. According to Fleming (1984), black students attending a predominately white institution of higher learning have difficulty reaching this goal due to problems not shared by white students. At Midsouth State University it appeared that academic preparedness contributed to the student's difficulties or successes, with the younger students perhaps better prepared and certainly having higher expectations.

For example, this student was in the library xeroxing The Wall Street Journal. She was accompanied by a classmate. The student was a twenty year old freshman.

> (What are you doing?)
> I was copying some information for my economics class.
> (What do you expect to get out of this?)
> I expect to make an A on my test tomorrow.

While I was speaking to the classmate, she wrote this statement on a slip of paper then handed it to me as I prepared to leave.

> In my opinion, with any student, you get what you deserve, whether black or white. Whatever you put into studying, that's what you get out of it. So far, I have had positive results from my classes. Whatever I worked for, that's what I got. And so far my work has paid off!

Not all black students felt so confident. Fleming (1984) claimed white institutions resulted in the black student's "intellectual deterioration" over the college span of freshman to senior. The following excerpt was from a fifty-two year old junior education student. The policy of standardized testing, which some educators believe to be a sorting mechanism, complicated her academic achievement.

> I prayed so hard and I studied so hard and I made it. (speaking of a difficult test) I'm used to making the Dean's list practically every semester. This time my GPA really went down -- it's still a 2.something, but I transferred here with a 3.43.
> (What has been the biggest problem?)
> At the community college we knew what we were going to have on our test. Over here you have to read the book, and they lecture, and some of the test do not come from the lecture. It seems they're a fundamental test. Everybody taking that course has to take the same test and it may not be what the instructor talked about. That's what floored me. What the lecture's about? I keep writing all these notes and I mean I really detailed, whatever she said, I had it down. When I take the test -- EEK! I study and read all these chapters and I don't know -- something I'm doing wrong. I be looking on a test, I be looking to see whatever -- see what they're talking about. What she says, that's what I'm looking for that test to be.

Students over thirty lent insight into difficulties experienced by generations schooled prior to integration or during early integration days. Those students often expressed the burden of their academic history while struggling to be successful.

> In the ninth grade I was bussed to Cityschool. The books were all new and more advanced. It took me years to catch up. I always felt behind. Still do. Someone said it was because the school board gave us old books that should have been thrown out. I don't know. I was an A student in the black school, became a C-D student in the new school. But I will persist.

It was found at Midsouth State University that black students were reticent to claim racism was the bases of their classroom experience with faculty or peers. On many occasions I heard the phrase, "I don't want to say it was a racial thing but ..." Admittedly, the "but" could have something to do with their being interviewed by a white student, but Fleming (1984) attributed such remarks to acquiescing to perceived white authority. For example:

> I worked hard on this class project. I brought in current events, a practical demonstration, and a poster. The class conducted formal evaluations on each presentation. They said my lesson was too advanced for young students, it would frighten them. I went to the school and presented the lesson. the children loved it. I don't want to say it is a racial thing but there were only three blacks in the class.

In addition to difficulties with peers, these students experienced difficulty in their "Experiences with Faculty", who were usually white and whom the students frequently viewed as unsympathetic and unapproachable. They were especially "hard" on the liberal arts instructors.

> Most of the social science teachers are helpful -- but with the hard sciences you get a hard teacher -- I mean, not just hard -- I mean hard as far as their personality is concerned. It gets difficult sometimes. I feel alienated. What am I supposed to do here? You know what to expect. You're more surprised when you get a different reaction.

It is hypothesized that positive relationships with faculty contribute to cognitive growth. Fleming (1984) saw black students as having little informal contact with white faculty. At Midsouth State University the faculty were often seen as cold and unfeeling in their performance of professional roles like academic advising as well. Black students felt that even in areas where they expected to have access to faculty aid they had to rely solely on their own efforts.

> My advisor was not helpful at all, so I'm self advised at this point. I read the catalogs. I know what I need to take and I know what I can't handle. I understand this man has a lot of students, but at least make me think you're interested. Even if you can't call my name the next time you see me, at least try to recognize the face or something. I was really disappointed. When I started to school, I started in a black institution in Chicago. I felt the people there were interested in what I was doing and were interested in seeing me attain something. I feel like if I dropped out of Midsouth State tomorrow, nobody would give a damn. I really do.

And:

> I had a friend who took Spanish during the summer. The professor told them from the word go, "This is a summer class, you have a lot to learn. I don't have time for you if you're behind. Keep up and if you're having trouble get a tutor. She got a D out of the class and she's not a bad student.

Role modeling receives considerable attention in educational literature. There was a dearth of black role models at the university. Black community leaders claimed institutional racism inhibited employment of black faculty, especially at the administrative and tenured faculty level. Black students took note.

> In all the time I've been going to Midsouth, I have only been taught by one (full-time) professor, and I have not been taught by a black at all. I find it interesting -- I look around and just kind of count the heads, and I see the majority of my classmates are white but usually there's nine or ten blacks in there.

Another student also spoke of the difficulty caused by the use of adjunct faculty, who are hired by the semester, as needed, to teach one or two classes. Adjuncts rarely had office space on campus, and since they normally held full time jobs outside the university, student contacts were limited to the classroom.

> This semester none of the people that I'm taking a class from are full time instructors. They're all people that Midsouth has brought in. I've been going here since '87. I resent it. I resent it very much because a lot of these people I can't get in touch with. They don't want you calling their regular jobs. They don't want you calling them at home.

The policy of hiring adjunct faculty contributed, but did not determine the quality of student/faculty interaction. It is the philosophy of the instructor that was revealed in "if you only work a little harder".

> I had a high school chemistry teacher (adjunct faculty). He talked to you like you were in high school. I told him I was having problems -- I had not had any chemistry and had been out of high school for over sixteen years. he told me that he felt that if I put more time into it and just tried harder I'd do just fine. That was his advise. As far as him saying "let me see if I can help you with this"? I got a D out of the class. I have to repeat it. I hope I get a better teacher this time. I sat up until three o'clock in the morning to get that stuff. I had organic chemistry and did better with that. The teacher was there an hour before class, and I could go in and she would help me. She knew I was struggling. She would stay after class ten or fifteen minutes to get me through. This man told me, "If I just worked a little harder.

Social Arena

In a casual conversation with a black member of the administration, I commented on my photographic work at the University Center (UC). He noted that I "knew where to find them" (black students). All students were expected to gather at the UC for social interactions. However, there were sharp visual demonstrations of the differing uses of the facility. While white students were observed sitting alone between classes, black students were usually engaged with a group, or were asleep. Or, as Fleming (1984) proposed, black students sought support in a hostile environment, or responded to an environment that contributed to depression.

The preponderance of black students in the UC prompted a black student organization, concerned about black student academic achievement, to propose a week's boycott of the UC. It was suggested that if the black students were not gathering in the UC for social activities they would be engaged in studious activities in campus libraries or laboratories. The Boycott was unsuccessful.

The UC housed the BSA office and was the setting for black student organizations and functions, such as the Black Fashion Board shows. Unlike the Student Activities Council's (SAC) Fashion Board, which promoted professionalism, this black student organization suggested an orientation and purpose that was supportive rather than "professional". However, note the conflicting messages in the following interview segment. The speaker is a female student and a member of both Fashion Boards.

> (On the BSA and SAC Fashion Boards)
> Right now it seems like you take whoever tries out for the BSA, but maybe we'll get to the point where we will have the privilege of choosing who we want. Choose you -- choose you -- choose you. 'Cause with the SAC you don't just join, you try out. You may or may not make it. The guy who's over the BSA now is just letting all people be a part of something. I think that's good for some people who need a boost? I guess you say -- an outlet? I think that's nice. Even though

> an European or somebody would say "Ohh, she's just awful" -- you work with people and they learn. Maybe they won't be so awful.

Black students were acutely aware of the differences in black and white organizations' orientations. While they hesitantly desired competitive situations, which they recognized as important for professional competence, they understood support to be what the black student needed most. If they worked together, all would do better.

Fleming (1984) spoke of cross-pressures felt by the black student in a white institution. These pressures appeared strongest in purely social situations, where the student often demonstrated an inability to be other than hostile to whites. Fleming attributed much of this hostility as an opposition to white authority. However, it may reflect the black students' insecurity, the knowledge that their numbers are limited and they cannot afford to have their numbers siphoned off by whites, or a cultural history of racial tension.

> When I see black kids with white kids, it makes me mad. Why you over there, why not associate with me? I think they're brown nosing. Why ignore me?

Black female students expressed conflicts between conforming to parental pressures and real life dating opportunities on campus. This same student explained:

> My parents were brought up in the South in the 50s and 60s. They told me I could have white friends, but I could not bring a white boyfriend into the house. I admire kids that can adapt to either culture. Sometimes I want to adapt. I wonder what it's like.

According to Fleming (1984), black males on white campuses fell into the role that could best be described as subdominant. They became non-confrontational, non-competitive, and often depressed. She further stated that the intellectual loss often suffered by the black male, was in part the result of disruptive interpersonal relationships during the developmental time in life when males seek satisfying relationships with females.

The black male often compensated for his inability to obtain dominance in the white institution by seeking dominance in male-female relationships. The ensuing war of the sexes was almost always lost by the female. These conflicts frequently erupted in physical and public violence. Disappointing relationships with females were often complicated by equally disappointing physical relationships with other black men. Black bisexuality at Midsouth State University threw shadows on possible satisfying heterosexual relationships, and further complicated the males position.

In a discussion with a black male student, I used the term "homosexual". I was corrected. While he acknowledged the bisexual activity of many black males, he asserted their desires to have meaningful relationships with females. Many black women responded in the following fashion:

> I don't date campus black men. I'm afraid of AIDS. So even if they like women, and some are bisexual, I don't trust them. I date white men or wait until I go home to Mississippi.

Political Arena

Fleming said academic energies were often poured into political and social organizations. At Midsouth State University black organizations made visible a student body divided along racial lines. There were numerous black organizations sponsored by the university or student affairs. Black organizations, like the BSA, were quick to stress they were not separatist organizations. However, as exemplified by the BSA Fashion Board shows, white students did not participate in any manner, either as members of the organization or as spectators of the events. Many of the black organizations stated that their aim was to establish an integrated forum, yet the forums maintained all black leadership.

Collins' 1978 study of integration in a Midsouth high school found black students were reluctant to participate in extracurricular organizations and activities that were dominated by white students. However, once "white flight" had reduced the active white student population, black students gained leadership positions in the organizations. When this occurred, white students would no longer participate in the functioning of the organizations. Marked

racial boundaries observed in the Midsouth high school carried over to the university.

In the same manner that the SAC and BSA had an integrated fashion board and black fashion board the campus had an integrated newspaper and a black newspaper. The black organizations maintenance of black leadership was not well received by the white students who then used the integrated newspaper's letters-to-the-editor column to claim black racism on the part of those black organizations.

However, there were student attempts to address the issue of a divided student body. Recently, in response to an alleged racial incident at the crowning of a black homecoming queen, the black students organized Black Alliance for Student Equity, an organization that according to its president was "designed to bring equity for all students on campus". As of November, 1990, there was only one white student member. However, this student was the Secretary of the organization.

Conclusion

Midsouth State University black students voiced dissatisfaction with faculty, who they perceive as cold, unsympathetic, and unapproachable. Institutional policies frequently place part-time instructors in near impossible positions, for adjunct faculty's loyalty lies beyond the campus boundaries. The full burden, however, cannot be placed on the institution or on a policy that endorses the use of adjunct faculty. Regular faculty should reflect on the amount of time spent and the manner in which they conduct contact with black students. Recognizing the "face" and spending a few extra minutes does make a difference and does not require the concerted effort required to infuse a "hard" science discipline with social science issues.

It is intriguing that the public school integration of the 60s still effect college students perception of self. It was naive to think a court order and a few years could rectify academic inequities. Of course, few could foresee the influx of older students in higher education. The faculty needs to be aware that the students academic history could contribute to possible debilitating perceptions of self. The students' continuing struggle to succeed should be applauded and nurtured.

The strife between the black male and black female results in a stereotyping of cultural differences thought to be beyond the control of the institution. But as Fleming (1984) suggested, the role of the institution contributes to the subdominance of the black male through its lack of leadership opportunities. Faculty should attempt to incorporate leadership opportunities in classroom situations for all students. If a black male comes in late, sits in the back of the class, and goes to sleep, an instructor could merely rotate the students and disrupt that pattern.

In addition, if the institution is to erase the racist image held in the local black metropolitan community, the community that supplies the black student, it must secure more black faculty and administrators. White faculty, too, can role model for both black and white students by contributing energies and time to black student organizations and by providing a white face at a black students' function. Initially, such a risk taker must be prepared to sit alone, or be asked, "Just who is your friend?"

Foremost, by dealing with cultural diversity openly and immediately, especially in geographical areas where cultural diversity consist of only two groups, faculty can introduce reflection to all of their students. Margot Ely (Anzul, Ely, 1988) spoke boldly of selling awareness. "If my stance about selling awareness sounds manipulative and authoritarian, that may well be, although it is certainly public... I worry far less that I have an impact as a teacher and far more about the quality of that impact (p. 69). How we teach cannot be distinguished from what we teach.

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